



Innovation and 19th century hotel industry evolution



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A novel methodology using the multi-level perspective illustrates hotel evolution.
- Innovations that cumulatively influenced English hotel evolution are analysed.
- Original data from 19th century business directories & newspapers are evaluated.
- Growth in the number of English hotels increased dramatically after 1870.
- An original 1764 advert which promoted the first hotel to operate in London.

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ABSTRACT

This article adopts a novel methodology to explore the transformation of the nineteenth century English lodging industry from an inn-keeping model in the late 1700's to a professional hotel management model in the early 1900's. The multi-level perspective methodology employed in this research is a mid-range theory, which uses elements of technological transitions and the concept of niche innovation cumulation to explain the evolution of the hospitality industry from the mid 1760's to 1914. At the beginning of the nineteenth century English inns provided a rudimentary experience. By the end of the century, the English hotel industry had adopted domestic and international innovations, to improve service quality and comfort.

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1. Introduction

To date, sources which describe the history of the English hotel industry¹ do not engage with complex theoretical constructs to explain the evolution of the industry from its origins in the mid eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. This article makes a contribution to tourism history research by providing a novel methodological approach, a multi-level perspective, to analysing hotel industry evolution. The article also responds to John Walton's translation of Sherman's observation in *Paradis a vendre* that tourism research 'has gravitated around two disconnected poles, that of meta-theory and that of micro-history but a more fertile approach would be to think of both perspectives at the same time' (Walton, 2009, p. 784), by adopting the

multi-level perspective (a mid-range theory) to explore the cumulative socio-technological innovations which transformed the English hotel industry in the long nineteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century accommodation offered to travellers in England was rudimentary (Borer, 1972; Granville, 1841; Harper, 1906; Simmons, 1984; Smith, 1855; Taylor, 2003; and; White, 1968), but by the end of the nineteenth century an English hotel industry had emerged which provided a greater range of enhanced facilities/services and catering for a wider range of customers (Slattery, 2009; Taylor, 2003). This transformation from an inn-keeping business into a more professional hotel management industry was not dependent upon a single factor, innovation or personality. It was the accumulation of a wide range of different innovations which combined to transform the system of hospitality at that time.

In historiography, there are grand theories and grand narratives which seek to generalise the history of a country, industry or period – for example Jurgen Osterhammel's global history of the nineteenth century, *The Transformation of the World* (Osterhammel,

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¹ The focus of this research is on the English hotel industry.

2014). Then there are empirical articles which focus on data collection and analysis at a micro-level – for example O'Mahoney & Clark's (2013) research in to the evolution of public houses in Colonial Victoria, Australia. In between grand theories and micro-level empirical data, the concept of middle-range theories was proposed by Robert Merton to enable sociologists to develop an intermediate theory which builds upon empirical research but is not sufficiently generalizable to be designated as grand theory (Merton, 1949). According to Gabriel and Mennell (2011), middle-range theories concentrate on a specific field, a historical period and a geographical region. 'The multi-level perspective (MLP) is a middle-range theory' (Geels, 2011, p. 26), which has been adopted by academic researchers in a variety of different areas including archaeology (Raab & Goodyear, 1984), labour migration (Williams, 2007), and in tourism by Romero and Tejada (2011).

Historical tourism research has employed a wide range of methodologies including the supply and demand approach linked to Schumpeterian innovation in Majorca, Spain (Cirer-Costa, 2012); historical narrative and interpretation in the Chinese Eastern Jin Dynasty period (Yan & Mc Kercher, 2013); the Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework combined with urban studies and tourism literature in Asheville, North Carolina, USA (Strom & Kerstein, 2015); and a density-based model of localised competition in Manhattan, New York, USA from 1898 to 1990 (Baum & Mezas, 1992).

However, histories of the English and British hotel industry are primarily descriptive narratives which lack contextualisation, interpretation or synthesis; examples include Mary Borer's *The British Hotel Through The Ages* (Borer, 1972) and Derek Taylor's *Ritzzy* (2003). One exception is Slattery (2009) who provides a supply and demand framework to explain the historical development of the hotel industry in *The Economic Ascent of the Hotel Business*. Although these sources offer interesting insights, the narratives do not convey the complex interaction of multiple innovations over the nineteenth century which transformed the character, scale and structure of the English hotel industry. The main aim of this article is to provide a more complex, nuanced analysis of that transformation by explaining the cumulative socio-technological innovations within the context of the macro, meso and micro environment.

Geels (2002) developed a MLP framework which incorporates a macro-level of landscape developments; a meso-level of socio-technical regimes; and micro-level innovative technological transitions. The landscape comprises long-term political, economic, socio-cultural and technological macro developments including significant political movements, war, economic trends, population changes, social evolution and technological revolutions which influence consumers and businesses. Socio-technical regimes comprise the multi-actor network of different social groups who populate an industry and who adhere to a 'semi-coherent set of rules' (Geels, 2002, p. 1260). A socio-technical regime provides stability within a given period. The actors in a socio-technical regime might include the producer network, its user groups, suppliers, financial network, distributors, societal groups and national or local government who all interact and influence the socio-technical regime in various ways. Changes in the landscape can disrupt an existing stable socio-technical regime which creates opportunities for niche innovations to be introduced and gradually become accepted. Over time, a series of technological innovations – described as niche cumulation (Geels, 2002, p. 1271) – are adopted which combine to disrupt an existing socio-technical regime, and eventually establish a new stable socio-technical regime. Geels defines Technological Transitions (TT) 'as major technological transformations in the way societal functions such as transportation, housing, feeding' and includes changes in 'user practices,

regulation, industrial networks, infrastructure and symbolic meaning' (Geels, 2002, p. 1257).

There are similarities between Geel's MLP and the theory of figurational sociology originally developed by Norbert Elias in the 1930's (Elias, 1978). Figurational sociology uses processual research to explore interdependent relationships between people whose lives evolve and are shaped by social figurations (Rojek, 1985). For Elias, since figurations are historically produced and are always in a state of flux, sociological research needs to incorporate a dynamic, temporal dimension – instead of a static focus (Mennell, 1998). By recognising the historical/temporal fluid context and incorporating macro-level and micro-level analysis in to the research, a reconstructed socio-genesis of a figuration can explain developments in human knowledge (Baur & Ernst, 2011). Geels' idea that multiple niche technological innovations influence the micro-context and the exogenous landscape to help transform a socio-technical regime, echoes Elias's concept of waves of knowledge, advancing in complementary processes and constantly changing a given social figuration (Elias, 1978). Apart from the conceptual similarities between Elias' figurational sociology and Geel's MLP, one of Elias's advocates - Stephen Mennell - adopted a figurational or socio-genetic approach in his comparative history of cooking and eating in England and France, and the civilising of appetite (Mennell, 1996).

Fig. 1 is an adaption of Geels' (2002) framework and provides an illustration of those landscape developments and the socio-technological niche innovations, which gradually combined to change the 18th Century traditional English inn-keeping socio-technical regime into a new configuration of professional hotel management by the early twentieth century.

The methodology employed in this research is historical narrative where 'the significance of an event or fact is derived from its position or role in the overall historical account rather than as a discrete, testable occurrence' (Decker, Kipping, & Wadhvani, 2015, p. 31). The historical method adopts an interpretative approach which investigates 'the causal motors that drive change through time' (Smith & Lux, 1993, p. 595). The theoretical context is based upon Geel's MLP framework (Geels, 2002) and figurational sociology (Elias, 1978). Secondary data from generic and specialist historical texts, such as Barzun (2000) and Wolmar (2007), is used to explain nineteenth century landscape developments; whilst specialist hotel and restaurant history texts support the industry context. Although some of the industry texts, e.g. Borer (1972) and Slattery (2009) are largely derivative, it is evident that Taylor's 'Ritzzy' (2003) and Spang's 'Invention of the Restaurant' (2011) are based upon a considerable amount of original research.

Primary data sources include contemporary business directories (1794–1901); memoirs by travellers (Granville, 1841) and notable chefs (Escoffier, 1997); and national and specialist hotel industry newspapers (1764–1897). Eleven business directories were manually analysed to explore the growth in the number of hotels in four different locations which are listed in these publications. However, in this period not all businesses were listed in business directories (Cook, 1843) so the data is not complete and the evidence can only demonstrate trends. To produce valid research outputs, business historians need to ensure that their sources are authentic – known as external criticism - and that the details 'in a source are credible' – known as internal criticism (Wood, 1990, p. 84). It is clearly evident that the business directories, memoirs, and newspapers were published at the time and are therefore authentic. The veracity of the content of business directories is transparent; but newspaper editorials, readers' letters and reports comprise peoples' opinions at the time and can therefore be contested. However, most of the newspaper evidence used in this research does not engage in controversial or political commentary

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